

# Flu Shot Advice Hits Home With Asthma Patients

BY DENISE NAPOLI

BALTIMORE — Among children with asthma who received a recommendation from their physician to get the influenza vaccine, the rate of subsequent vaccination was 76%, compared with 16% among children who reported not receiving a recommendation from their physician.

The low vaccination rate among the children who did not receive a recommendation, therefore, contributed to a relatively low vaccination rate among the entire cohort (57%), for whom the flu shot is strongly recommended.

The data, presented in a poster at the annual meeting of the Pediatric Academic

**Among children with asthma who received a recommendation from their physician to get the influenza vaccine, the rate of subsequent vaccination was 76%.**

Societies, should serve as a reminder to physicians treating pediatric asthma patients that their guidance really does have a profound effect, according to study author Dr. Kevin J. Dombkowski.

Dr. Dombkowski is from the child health evaluation and research unit in the division of general pediatrics at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

A total of 189 parents of children with asthma were interviewed over the phone between April and June 2008. The children were between ages 5 and 18 years, and were culled from Michigan Medicaid and Title V files. Parents were asked about health care utilization during the prior 2007-2008 influenza season, as well as vaccination during that season.

Overall, 153 patients, or 81%, had seen their physician for asthma management or treatment sometime during the flu season, whether for a regular checkup or after an acute problem.

"Most [patients] have an office visit at which influenza vaccine could be given,"

wrote the authors, or during which a strong recommendation to receive the shot could be communicated.

The data also revealed a lack of education about influenza vaccine among these high-risk children and their parents. When the 82 parents who reported that their child did not receive a flu vaccine were asked why, some of the top reasons included that no one had told them that a flu shot was needed for their child

(15%); they thought that their child did not need one (18%); or they were concerned that the influenza vaccine would result in their child getting the flu (10%).

Although 70% of patients reported receiving a recommendation from their physician in this study, Dr. Dombkowski said in an interview that physicians can do better. He referenced a study he conducted several years ago in a different setting, which showed that only 20% of

asthmatic patients had received the flu shot.

"Meanwhile, over 60% of these kids [in the study] had been in the office during flu season," he said, revealing the "missed opportunities" for influenza vaccine education, recommendation, and administration.

Dr. Dombkowski said that the study was funded by the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation. ■

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